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TROPICAL VERSUS ARCTIC EXPLORATION

By the late THEODORE DE BOOY¹

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WE wonder if the average reader has ever realized that tropical exploration spells something else besides sitting on a hotel veranda, surrounded by dusky servitors whose sole object in life is the carrying of iced drinks which are usually said to be provided with the proverbial "stick" and sometimes even with the "big stick"? Compared to what the general ideas are about trips to the polar regions, it must be admitted that one feels more favorably inclined towards a visit to the tropics than towards a voyage to the arctic seas. Let us see how the two journeys compare.

One leaves New York, let us say, for a voyage to the arctic regions. Knowing full well that one will find but little in the way of food after leaving the last Eskimo outpost, a stock of edibles is laid in that embraces the products of the Seven Seas. True, most of this stock is in canned form and not comparable to the delicacy of one's daily menu. But one has the means of transporting the stuff, first on the vessel that is used for the exploration and afterwards on the dog sleds that are certain to be employed on the venture. The glamor that goes with all arctic voyages does not fail to attach itself to the undertaking. In consequence, one is heralded by the newspapers, fêted by the scientific societies and farewelled by one's friends. This incident publicity also means that but little trouble is experienced, in normal times, to secure the necessary funds for the expedition.

The reverse of the above is true for the outfitting of a tropical undertaking. Funds are hard to secure. Does not the jungle provide all that is necessary towards a happy existence? Else why the breadfruit and the banana? And does not the coco palm provide the material for the building of houses, the making of hats, the manufacturing of mats and clothing and at the same time provide food in varied form? The tropical explorer asks for funds only in order to spend more time on the hotel veranda and, once in the bush, needs naught beyond the abundant resources of nature! As a result, with but few exceptions, the tropical expedition is all too scantily furnished with funds. Why trouble with clothing? The natives dispense

¹ The author of this article, distinguished for his explorations in tropical countries, died from influenza while it was passing through the press.—EDITOR.

with it. Why carry instruments or medicines? The tropical climate makes the latter unnecessary and, as for the instruments, why trouble to take observations when *per se* the tropical explorer is discredited before even leaving his native shores?

And now, let us see what happens when the field of exploration is actually reached. I am not qualified to speak of arctic conditions from personal experience, but any reader of arctic literature will agree with me that the situation as I shall show it is more or less in accord with general experiences. As a parallel, I shall show what the tropical equivalents are and leave the reader to decide upon the verdict.

The arctic explorer leaves his base. He is generally accompanied by a goodly party which makes traveling all the jollier. The provisions, be they ample or be they scant, are packed on sleds, drawn by trusty dogs. Generally the trusty dogs are too trusting, as they not infrequently wind up their useful career as nourishment for the explorers. Progress over the ice is fairly rapid and at times easy, especially when the explorers are riding on the sleds. One can see in all directions. There are no hostile inhabitants to contest the right to visit the region. It is cold, but the special clothes that are worn go far towards alleviating this hardship. Camp is made at night, after covering perhaps as much as twenty or more miles, a satisfactory day's progress. No time is lost in setting up the small tents and in preparing the food with liquid fuel. Outside of the cold, one is quite content.

The tropical explorer leaves his base. He usually travels alone or at the best with but one companion. No matter who the chief of the party is, he will usually quarrel with his associates before the expedition has progressed very far. This is due not to a mean streak in his make-up, but to the irritating effect of the climate and the mosquitoes. Naught but two saints—and these are scarce upon the earth—would travel a hundred miles through the tropical bush without having at least one violent quarrel. On leaving the base, certain provisions have to be taken along. The tropical forest is not nearly so generous with its gifts as one hears mentioned. The provisions that are taken weigh a great deal and have to be transported on the backs of the carriers. One is lucky to obtain sufficient carriers. Generally, the demand is far greater than the supply, so that, in the end, the amount of food that goes with the explorers is pitifully small. However, the tropical explorer is by nature optimistic and generally risks the chance of being unable to obtain game during his stay in the jungle. Of the food carried, at least fifty per cent. will spoil on the trip. This is mostly due

to the intense humidity that is experienced. The daily progress made depends entirely upon the nature of the country. Sometimes it is as much as ten miles per day and often it is as little as four miles per day. Under the most unfavorable circumstances it means a slow, laborious cutting through the dense underbrush which is fatiguing and trying on the nerves. The thorns, with which so many bushes are plentifully endowed, do not fail to exact a bloody toll from the explorer. The thousand and one insect varieties lose no time to apply for their quota of the traveler's blood. Again, hostile Indians may be met with, and these may carry out what the insects tried to do, and put a final stop to progress in the desired direction. It is at last decided to make camp at night. Some leaves are cut and a temporary shelter is hastily erected. The more hastily this is done, the surer it is to rain that very night. By dusk, one begins to consider cooking a meal. Despite all the fallen giants of the forest, there is nothing harder to find than dry firewood in the tropics. At last a smouldering fire, with much smoke, has been created. Just about then, the mosquito outposts have spread the news to their far-off brethren that a newcomer is in the forest.

The arctic explorer travels on. One day's progress is not much different from another. Sometimes it snows and sometimes it is clear. Always he can see the road ahead. His provisions get low after a while, but he is still able to press on with comparatively little fatigue. At last the goal is fairly near. If it is reached and he returns in safety, a new discovery is hailed by press and public. If he fails, the return voyage provides him with ample leisure to explain, ingenuously, wherein the failure lay and how it was caused. The return of the arctic explorer is hailed with joy and he has even less difficulty than before in obtaining funds for a new expedition. Should failure mean death, his widow is fêted, honored and made to publish reminiscences of her husband. As for the lonely corpse upon the ice floe, it is generally discovered in later years. Death in the arctic means death from cold and starvation. I can not believe that such a death is hard.

The tropical explorer travels on. There is a startling variety in the experiences of each day. Sometimes he travels through the dense underbrush, combating with nature at every step, cutting down the very effective barriers of jungle which seem to defy his attempts at exploring the mysteries that lie beyond. Again, the trail leads over forbidding mountains. On the summits of these a cold is experienced that eclipses any cold suffered in the arctic. The explorer lacks all means to pro-

tect himself against these climatic changes. After a while he strikes a swampy region where the dreaded miasma covers the landscape with a mantle of death. Wild animals, wild Indians and wilder insects conspire against the traveler's happiness and peace of mind. Provisions get low. The tortured explorer, racked by fever, covered with insect bites and sores, enfeebled from lack of food, continues only because he knows that he is nearer to his goal than to his base. And if he reaches his goal? The few that hear of his success must needs consult a map to learn of his achievement. His friends regard his claims to recognition with scant concern and are too much inclined to dwell upon the delights of the tropics to take the narrative of his hardships seriously. The explorer is forgotten before he was ever remembered. He is forced to return to his tropics where nature at least does not belittle his attempts at solving the mysteries of the Beyond, but appears to feel that the great obstacles she places in his way serve but to heighten his achievement. And if the explorer fails to reach his goal? It would not be well to dwell upon the nature of his death. May be some kindly Indian arrow made it short. May be he lingered long, deserted by his carriers, tortured by insects, with fever visions that accentuated his agony, helpless to proceed, helpless even to do more than wish for a speedy ending. So have the tropics taken toll, year after year, century after century.

And now for the results. The arctic, practically all explored, and we have arrived at the realization that, while the scientific results of the expeditions are beyond price, the practical results have yet to be demonstrated. The tropics, partially explored, and the world has been enriched with new lands, new minerals, new drugs and a wider outlook. The pioneer, the explorer, has been forgotten, but the settled areas that resulted directly from his labors and his sufferings are monuments more impressive than those an ungrateful public failed to erect.

It must not be thought that these lines are in any way intended to slight the pretensions of arctic explorers. The work done by these intrepid travelers is beyond all praise. But so is the work that is carried out by the tropical explorer and this fact appears to be so seldom recognized, more is the pity! For the first, the medals, the glamor and the glory; for the second, the obscure position in the scheme of things in general, or, at the best, the self-knowledge of a task well done. And at the worst—the bleaching bones under the noon-day sun, seen only by the jaguars and the parrots, a warning, and at the same time, an attraction, to others who have the same longing for the tropical mysteries.